

EXTRA MEN¹

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THE pretty, peaceful Jersey farm-land slopes gently up from the Delaware River to the little hill which Princeton crowns. It is uneventful country. The railway does not cross it, nor any of the great motor trunk roads. On the river itself there is no town of considerable size, though on the map you read the quaint name of Washington Crossing for a little hamlet of a few houses. This will remind you of the great days when on these sleepy fields great history was made. But the fields have lain quiet in the sun now for more than a century, and even the legends of Revolutionary days are for the most part forgotten along these country roads.

As for modern legends, the very phrase seems proof of their impossibility. And in spite of her spacious and resounding past, New Jersey's name now seems to mean incorporations and mosquitoes and sea-bathing and popcorn-crisp rather than either legend or romance. But with the coming of the Great War strange things are stirring in the world, and in the farthest corners of the land the earth is shaken by the tramp of new armies. In the skies by day and night there is a sign. And the things one does not believe can happen may be happening, even in New Jersey.

The small events on the Burr ridge Road which are here set down cannot even be authenticated. There are people down by the river who say they saw a single horseman go through the village at dusk, but not one seems to know

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which way he came. There is no ferry at Washington Crossing and the bridge at Lambertville had, since three that afternoon, been closed for repairs. What facts are set down here—and indeed they are scarcely facts—were acquired because a chauffeur missed the road and a motor then broke down. What story there is—and indeed there is perhaps not much story—has been pieced together from fragments collected that afternoon and evening. And if the chronicle as now written is vague, it can be urged that, though it all happened so recently as last year, it is already as indeterminate and misty as a legend.

We may, however, begin with undisputed facts. When her grandson enlisted for the war old Mrs. Buchan became very genuinely dependent on the little farm that surrounded the lovely old Colonial house on the Burr ridge Road. (Meadows, and horses, and hay and the quality and price of it, have much to do with our story—as, indeed, befits a rural chronicle.) The farm had been larger once, and the hospitality which the old house could dispense more lavish. Indeed, the chief anecdote in its history had been the stopping there once of Washington, to dine and rest on his way to join the army in New York. Old Mrs. Buchan, who, for all her gentleness, was incurably proud, laid special stress on the fact that on *that* night the great man had not been at an inn—which was in the twentieth century to cheapen his memory by a sign-board appeal to automobile parties—but at a gentleman's house. A gentleman's house it still was; somehow the Buchans had always managed to live like gentlemen. But if George, the gay, agreeable last one of them, could also live that way, it was because his grandmother practised rigid heart-breaking economy. The stories of her shifts and expedients were almost fables of the countryside. When George came home—he had a small position in a New York broker's office—there was gaiety and plenty. He might well have been deceived into thinking that the little he sent home from New York was ample for her needs. But when he went back his grandmother lived on nothing, or less than that. She dressed for dinner, so they said, in black silk and old lace, had

the table laid with Lowestoft china and the Buchan silver, and ate a dish of corn-meal mush, or something cheaper if that could be found!

George Buchan's enlistment — it was in the aviation service — had been early. And very early he was ordered to France to finish his training there. Two days before he expected his ship to sail the boy got a few hours' furlough and came to the Burrige Road to say good-by to his grandmother.

What was said we must imagine. He was all the old lady had left in the world. But no one ever doubted that she had kissed him and told him to go, and to hold his head high as suited an American and a Buchan. Georgie would perhaps have had no very famous career in Wall Street, but no one doubted that he would make a good soldier. There had always been a Buchan in the armies of the Republic, his grandmother must have reminded him. And very likely Georgie, kissing her, had reminded her that there had always been a Buchan woman at home to wish the men God speed as they marched away, and told her too to hold her old head high.

There must have been some talk about the money that there wouldn't be now; without his little weekly check she was indeed almost penniless. It is quite likely that they spoke of selling the house and decided against it. Part of the boy's pay was of course to come to his grandmother, but, as she explained, there were so many war charities needing that, and then the wool for her knitting — She must manage mostly with the farm. There was always the vegetable-garden, and a few chickens, and the green meadow, which might be expected to yield a record crop of hay.

We may imagine that the two — old lady and boy — stepped out for a moment into the moonlit night to look at the poor little domain of Buchan that was left. Under the little breeze that drifted up from the Delaware the grass bent in long waves like those of the summer seas that Georgie was to cross to France. As the Buchans looked at it they might have felt some wonder at the century-old fertility of the soil. Back in the days of the Revolution Washington's horse had pastured there one

night. Then, and in 1812, and during the great battle of the States, the grass had grown green and the hay been fragrant, and the fat Jersey earth had out of its depths brought forth something to help the nation at war. Such a field as that by the old white house can scarcely be thought of as a wild, primeval thing; it has lived too long under the hand of man. This was a Buchan field, George's meadow, and by moonlight it seemed to wave good-by to him.

"You aren't dependent on me now, dear," he may have said, with his arm around his grandmother. "I just leave you to our little garden patch and our chickens and the green meadow."

"You must n't worry, dear. They'll take care of me," she must have answered.

So George went away; and the night after, the night before he sailed, the horseman and his company came.

It was at dusk, and a gossamer silvery mist had drifted up from the Delaware. He had hitched his horse by the gate. He was in riding-breeches and gaiters and a rather old-fashioned riding-coat. And in the band of his hat he had stuck a small American flag which looked oddly enough almost like a cockade. He knocked at the door, quite ignoring the new electric bell which George had installed one idle Sunday morning when his grandmother had felt he should have been at church. As it happened, old Mrs. Buchan had been standing by the window, watching the mist creep up and the twilight come, thinking of Georgie so soon to be upon the water. As the horseman knocked she, quite suddenly and quite contrary to her usual custom, went herself to the door.

His hat was immediately off, swept through a nobler circle than the modern bow demands, and he spoke with the elaboration of courtesy which suited his age; for, though his stride was vigorous, he was no longer young. It was a severe, careworn face of a stern, almost hard, nobility of expression. Yet the smile when it came was engaging, and old Mrs. Buchan, as she smiled in return, found herself saying to herself that no Southerner, how-

ever stern, could fail to have this graceful lighter side. For his question had been put in the softer accents of Virginia and of the states farther south.

"I've lost my way," he began, with the very slightest, small, gay laugh. But he was instantly serious. "It is so many, many years since I was here."

Mrs. Buchan pointed up the road.

"That is the way to Princeton."

"Princeton, of course. That's where we fought the British and beat them. It seems strange, does it not, that we now fight with them?"

"We must forget the Revolution now, must we not?" This from Mrs. Buchan.

"Forget the Revolution!" he flashed back at her, almost angrily. Then more gently: "Perhaps. If we remember liberty!" He glanced an instant up the road to Princeton hill and then went on. "They fought well then, madam. As a soldier I am glad to have such good allies. But I was forgetting. Yonder lies Princeton, and from there there is the post-road to New York, is there not? I must be in New York by morning."

Mrs. Buchan was old-fashioned, but she found herself murmuring amazedly something about railroads and motor-cars. But he did not seem to hear her.

"Yes," he continued, "I must be in New York by morning. The first transport with our troops sails for France."

"I know," she said, proudly. "My grandson, George Buchan, sails for France."

"George Buchan? There was a George Buchan fought at Princeton, I remember."

"There was. And another George Buchan in the War of Eighteen-twelve. And a John in the Mexican War. And a William in eighteen sixty-three. There was no one in the Spanish War—my son was dead and my grandson was too young. But now he is ready."

"Every American is ready," her visitor answered. "I am ready."

"You?" she broke out. And for the first time she seemed to see that his hair was white. "Are you going?"

"Every one who has ever fought for America is going. There is a company of them behind me. Listen."

Down the road there was faintly to be heard the clatter of hoofs.

"Some joined me in Virginia, some as we crossed the Potomac by Arlington, where there is a house which once belonged to a relative of mine. And there were others, old friends, who met me as we came through Valley Forge in Pennsylvania. You would not now know Valley Forge," he finished, half to himself.

The river mist had crept farther up and was a little thicker now. The moon had risen and the mist shimmered and shone almost as if by its own light. The world was indeed of the very substance of a dream. The hoofbeats on the road grew nearer, and at last, while old Mrs. Buchan stood in a kind of amazed silence, they came into sight, even then mere shadowy, dim, wavering figures behind the gossamer silver veil which had drifted there from the lovely Delaware. The horses looked lean and weary, though perhaps this was a trick of the moonlight. Yet they dropped their heads and began eagerly to crop the short, dusty grass by the roadside. The moonlight seemed to play tricks with their riders, too. For in the fog some of them seemed to have almost grotesquely old-fashioned clothes, though all had a sort of military cut to them. Some few, indeed, were trim and modern. But the greater part were, or seemed to Mrs. Buchan to be, in shabby blue or worn gray. The chance combination of the colors struck her. She was an old woman and she could remember unhappy far-off days when blue and gray had stood for the fight of brother against brother. Into her eyes the tears came, yet she suddenly smiled through them—a pair of quite young men lounged toward the fence, and then stood at ease there, the blue-clad arm of one affectionately and boyishly thrown around the other's gray shoulder.

"These go with you?" asked old Mrs. Buchan, still held by her memories.

"Yes. They are of all kinds and all ages, and some of them were not always friends. But you see—" He smiled and pointed to the lads by the fence. "One of

them is from Virginia and the other from Ohio. Virginia and Ohio fought once. But I only say that I can remember that Ohio was part of Virginia once long ago. And is not Virginia part of Ohio and Ohio part of Virginia again now? I should be pushing on, however, not talking. It is the horses that are tired, not the men."

"And hungry?" suggested Mrs. Buchan.

"The horses, yes, poor beasts!" he answered. "For the men it does not matter. Yet we must reach New York by morning. And it is a matter of some five-and-fifty miles."

"Rest a half-hour and let the horses graze. You can make it by sunrise."

Mrs. Buchan went a little way down the path. It was lined with pink and white clove-pinks and their fragrance was sweet in the night.

"Open the gate there to the left, men," she called out, and her voice rang, to her, unexpectedly strong and clear. "Let the horses graze in my green meadow if they will."

They gave an answering cheer from out the mist. She saw the meadow gate swing open and the lean horses pass through; a long, long file of them.

"But they will spoil your hay crop," objected the horseman. "And it should be worth a fair sum to you."

Mrs. Buchan drew herself up. "It is of no consequence," she answered.

He bowed again.

"But I don't understand," she almost pleaded, staring again at his white hair and the little flag in his hatband that looked so oddly like a cockade. "You say you sail to-morrow with my boy?"

"I think you understand as well as any one."

"Do I?" she whispered. And the night suddenly seemed cold and she drew her little shawl of Shetland wool more tightly about her shoulders. Yet she was not afraid.

Her guest stooped and, rising, put one of her sweet-smelling clove-pinks in his button-hole.

"If you permit, I will carry it for your boy to France. We are extra men, supercargo," he went on. "We shall cross with every boat-load of boys who sail for France

—we who fought once as they must fight now. They said of me, only too flatteringly, that I was first in peace. Now I must be first in war again. I must be on the first troop-ship that goes. And I shall find friends in France. We have always had friends in France, I imagine, since those first days. Of course, madam, you are too young to remember the Marquis de la Fayette.”

“Yes, I am too young,” answered old Mrs. Buchan. And she smiled through her tears at the thought of her eighty years.

“You’re a mere chit of a girl, of course,” he laughed — one of the few times his gravity was relaxed. “Shall I know your boy, I wonder?” Then, without waiting for her answer, “The George Buchan who fought at the battle of Princeton was about twenty-two, slim and straight, with blue eyes and brown hair and an honest, gallant way with him, and a smile that one remembered.”

“You will know my boy,” she told him. “And I think he will know you, General.”

Even now she swears she does not quite know what she meant by this. The magic of the June night had for the moment made everything possible. Yet she will not to this day say who she thinks the horseman may have been. Only that George would know him, as she had.

“I want them all to know that I am there,” he had replied. “They will know. They will remember their country’s history even as we remember. And when the shells scream in the French sky they will not forget the many times America has fought for liberty. They will not forget those early soldiers. And they will not forget Grant and Lee and Lincoln. The American eagle, madam, has a very shrill note. I think it can be heard above the whistle of German shrapnel.”

He drank a glass of sherry before he went, and ate a slice of sponge-cake. Perhaps altogether he delayed a scant quarter of an hour. The lean horses came streaming forth from the green meadow, a long, long file; and while the moon and the river mist still made it a world of wonder, the company, larger somehow than she had

thought it at first, clattered off up the Princeton road toward New York and salt water and the ships.

The mist cleared for a moment and the great green meadow was seen, so trampled that it seemed that a thousand horses must have trampled it. Al Fenton, dignified by Mrs. Buchan as "the farmer," had now belatedly roused and dressed himself. He stood by the old lady's side and dejectedly surveyed the ruin of the hay crop. He is a sober, stupid, serious witness of what had happened. And this is important; for when the sun rose, and Mrs. Buchan opened her window, the breeze from the river rippled in long green waves over a great green meadow where the grass still pointed heavenward, untrampled, undisturbed. The Buchan meadow could still, as George had believed it would, take care of his grandmother.

This is the story, to be believed, or not, as you like. They do as they like about it in Jersey. But old Mrs. Buchan believes that with each American troop-ship there will sail supercargo, extra men. And she believes that with these extra men we cannot lose the fight. George, too, writes home to her that we shall win.